



SHE'S EVERYBODY'S GRACIE

We Say She's Ours: They Say She's Theirs

GRACIE FIELDS arrived in Auckland on a Saturday afternoon and left the following Wednesday morning at half-past eight. Between her arrival and departure she made a recording for 1ZB, made another for the Government Film Unit, had a press interview, signed hundreds of autograph books, held telephone conversations with various aged and sick admirers who were unable to see her, visited the military annexe of the Auckland Hospital and gave an entertainment lasting more than an hour, attended a civic reception, gave two concerts in the Auckland Town Hall, turned two cartwheels, dealt with enormous quantities of mail, and received a limited—but not very limited—number of visitors.

On Saturday afternoon I went to the airport to watch her arrival and to try to arrange for an interview for *The Listener*. Half an hour before the flying-boat was due the road outside the gates was crowded with men, women and children. As I showed my pass and went

(continued from previous page)

This is the first appointment of a full-time specialist tutor in Adult Education. The subject of music was chosen because it so happens that music has gone ahead fairly well in Auckland. Mr. Jensen's W.E.A. music classes there have been large and enthusiastic, his lunch-hour music has become an institution, and his string orchestra has done some good work. The lessons learnt from this experiment will be applied to future experiments in other specialised subjects. But although it is a job that has not been done before, it may not turn out to be very strange to the man who has been chosen for it. Rather it looks as if he will now be able to apply himself completely to doing what he has been trying to do in one way or another in his spare time—what there has been of it—for several years. And those who know what this has meant to the musical life of Auckland will hope for a lot from the new arrangement.

Listeners to 1YA will hear Owen Jensen giving two talks on "Music To-day" in the series "The Arts To-day" at 7.15 p.m. on Thursday, August 16, and Thursday, August 23.

through the gates I was followed by North-country complaints—if I could cum through the gates, why shouldn't they? It was the same inside, a couple of hundred people pressing against the barriers.

Before the plane arrived, while members of 1ZB's staff were setting up recording apparatus, I noticed a girl with a very big box of flowers. The box was inscribed from an old friend and the girl had been sent to deliver it from the florist. I asked her if she always did the delivering.

"I mostly do on Saturdays, but it's mostly to funerals or weddings," she said. "I've never had to deliver to the airport before."

"But I suppose you were quite glad of the chance?"

"Yes, I was. They were sending one of the other girls first, but I spoke up and then I got the job. It's the only chance I'll get to see her." It was certainly a much better chance than the chances of all the people lining the roadway, all the ones leaning over the railings, all the service personnel on the roofs and at the windows.

Sitting on the edge of a chair and constantly watching the sky through the window was a woman member of the Auckland Lancashire Society with a bouquet of spring flowers tied with a big ribbon printed LANCASHIRE. She told me—and she grew more pink with excitement as the minutes passed—that this was just a small welcome; there would be a much better bouquet given by members of the society at the concert on Monday evening.

A WHISTLE was Gracie's first greeting to Aucklanders; the whistle was followed by "thank you very much" over and over again as she received cheers and greetings from the crowd lining the route from the landing stage to the airport reception room. Many cameras clicked and a few buzzed as amateurs and professionals got stills and movies of her; suddenly she stopped.

"What's this?" she asked innocently, as 1ZB held a microphone out to her. Yes, she'd say a few words to her New Zealand listeners. More hand-shaking, a long pause to talk to a baby and the mother of the baby and at last she was in the reception room. Her hair is fair (she said at her concert that it was "touched oop"); her eyes are a bright, bright blue and big enough to roll effectively. She wore a black hat, a red scarf, a mink coat. Her hair is in curls in front, in a thick bun at the back (it's nothing to her to let it down and put it up again on the stage).

She was interviewed by 1ZB, went outside into the sun to talk and pose for the film unit, signed dozens of autograph books, answered some press questions, and at last was ready to leave for her hotel.

Baby-Snatcher

Behind the official party in the hall of the airport I heard a woman saying, "But she's gone off with it. She's taken it away." "Well you'd better go after her and get it," a man said. There goes an autograph book, I thought.

From the steps I watched the commotion as the woman excuse-me-pleased, excuse-me-pleased her way through the crowd as effectively as a Hollywood reporter in search of a news story. Beside her car Gracie Fields was standing with "it" in the middle of a laughing, admiring crowd. It was a baby called Jane, dressed in blue and looking quite cheerful about the snatching. Gracie talked to the baby, talked to the crowd, and then turned back and handed over Jane to her mother. Gracie got into her car and the mother came beaming back to the entrance hall. A highly successful episode.

WHEN I asked for a special interview for *The Listener* I was told that no individual interviews could be given. Well, could I have some written questions answered? Possibly. It wasn't a promise. On Monday I took my questions to the hotel and gave them to Dorothy Stewart, who is travelling with Gracie Fields. This is Dorothy Stewart who toured New Zealand some years ago singing at the piano. She is now a song writer in her spare time from the busy job of being J. C. Williamson's American representative, headquarters in New York. Her job on this tour seems to me to be a mixture of the work of a watchdog and the work of a diplomat. She keeps people away from Gracie Fields and she certainly helps reporters. She read my questions and promised to find a time to discuss them with Gracie Fields.

ON Tuesday evening I called for my answers and had a session with Miss Stewart. Gracie Fields had written a message (reproduced on this page) specially for New Zealand radio listeners and

Hello Everyone
It's grand to be
here at last
after trying to
get here for 10
long years.
My love to you
all.
Gracie Fields

Gracie's Message to New Zealand Radio Listeners

had written answers to some of the questions; others she had answered orally, and I received her remarks by a relay system, through Miss Stewart.

Q: You sometimes speak with scarcely an accent, other times with a broad accent. Does this mean that even as a child your Lancashire accent was assumed?

A: "I feel I am rather like a parrot because I can pick up almost any accent just as I hear it," Gracie wrote. "I could do this when I was a child and it has never been any trouble to me to copy different accents."

Q: How do you manage for energy? (By this time I had heard of the cartwheel, so I asked Miss Stewart about that: "Oh, she's so marvellously supple and agile, she can do anything!")

A: "I rest whenever possible and I try to keep out of mischief and so I keep my energy."

The Double Boomerang

Q: Is that smile always as genuine as it looks or is it really sometimes a stage smile you are forced to fall back on? Or is there a boomerang effect from the welcome people give you?

Miss Stewart said that this had been hard to answer; Gracie said, "I react to what I am getting, but people are always so kind and sweet that it never has to be a stage smile. I feel it is always a reflection." "But," said Miss Stewart, "there's something in that idea of the boomerang going from her to them."

"You mean a double boomerang effect?" I asked. "She is full of generosity and makes them all cheerful and they make her more cheerful in turn?"

"Yes, It's remarkable. If you watch their faces when they're listening to her, you see it. Their eyes shine and their smiles are full of happiness. She's got a wonderful personality."

She's "Ours" Everywhere

Q: Did you enjoy making *Holy Matrimony* as much as we enjoyed seeing it? Did you miss the singing in that film? Are you going to make any more films? As far as English and Hollywood films are concerned, do you consider yourself "our" Gracie or "their" Gracie?

"She did enjoy making *Holy Matrimony*," said Miss Stewart. "She really loves acting as much as singing as long as she has good lines and she feels that those lines were very clever. She does hope to make more films and hopes she will have some with lines as interesting and clever as those in *Holy Matrimony*. One still to come here is *Paris Underground*, which she made with Constance Bennett. And she's content to be everybody's Gracie. I once told her she's not a person but an institution. In America they call her our Gracie, in South Africa they call her our Gracie; in Australia, now in New Zealand, in England—

(continued on next page)